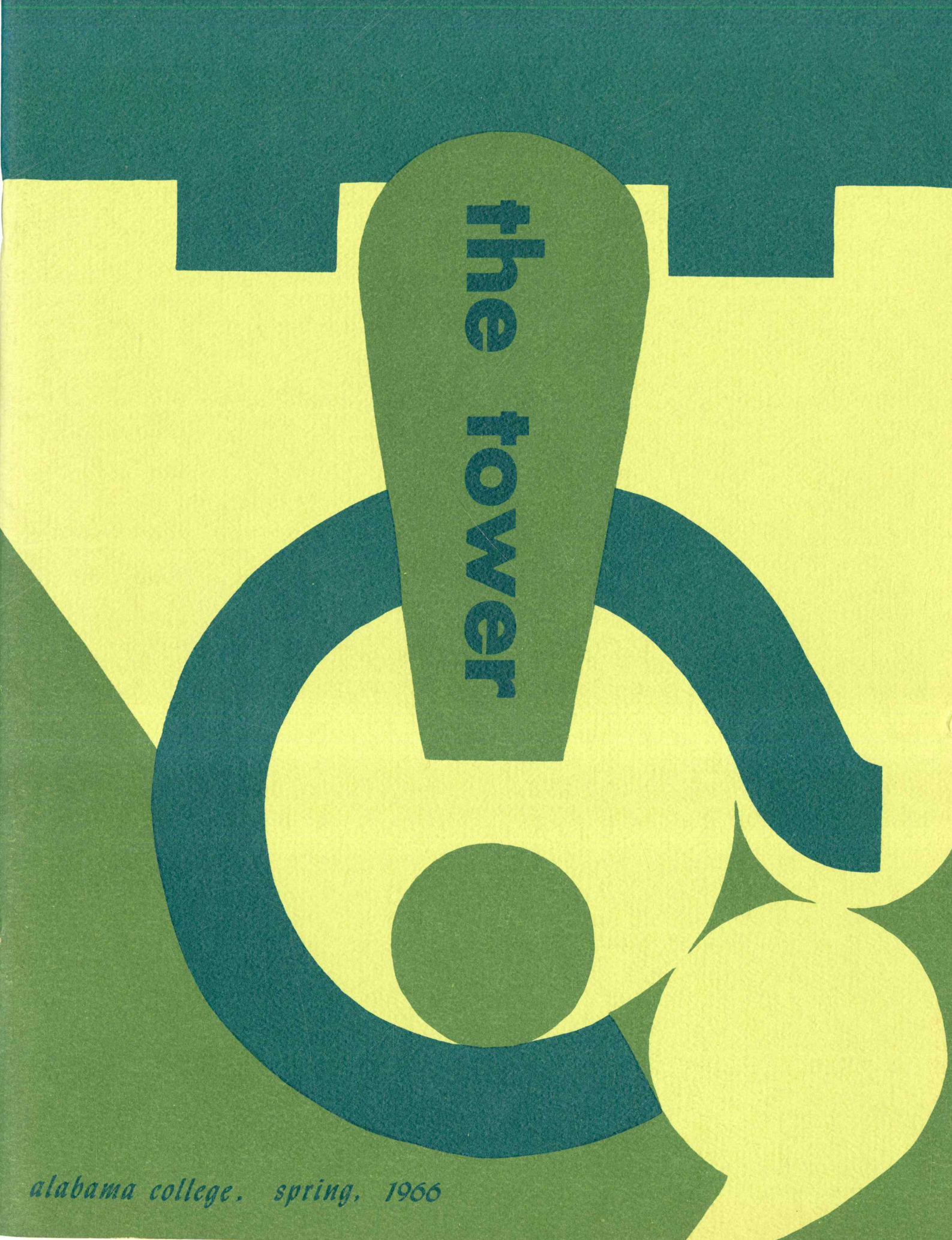


alabama college. spring, 1966

The Tower

Spring, 1966

The Literary Magazine of Alabama College

ESSAY

The Birth-Death Relationship of T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi"	Betty Whatley	9

FICTION

The Cobra	Jim Jackson	2
Dying Is Just Like Going to Sleep	Jim Jackson	11
The Satin Escape	Nell Batton	16

POETRY

The Enchanted City	Charles Malcolm Schofield	4
Oh Bod: For Edith Sitwell	Greg Henry	5
Enchanted Valley	Margaret Sarah Hearn	6
A Pebble Till "The Bettering of the Time"	Thomas Hubert	6
To Tell You You Are Lovely	Thomas Hubert	7
Love	Calvin Burton	7
To . . .	Greg Henry	7
Rain	Charles L. Culp	8
I Tried to Think About Us	Charles Malcolm Schofield	10
How Much of Beauty	Charles Malcolm Schofield	10
For Judith	Daniel Gray	10
Contemplation	Charles Malcolm Schofield	13
The First Kiss	Thomas Hubert	13
Love and Poetry	Thomas Hubert	13
Nightmare	Margaret Sarah Hearn	14
Escape	Margaret Sarah Hearn	14
Crystal	Sharon Henderson	15
December Ritual	Greg Henry	15
Thoughts in a Doubting Time	Charles Malcolm Schofield	17
Song of the Skis	Charles Malcolm Schofield	18
To the Girl Who Didn't Want a Poem	Greg Henry	19
Poem	Margaret Sarah Hearn	19

EDITOR	Buell Cobb
ASSOCIATE EDITOR	Greg Henry
EDITORIAL STAFF	Carol Weir, Karen Peyton, Connie Baker, Royce Jordan, Peggy Gaskin
ART	Karen McKeehan
COVER DESIGN	Paul Stuart Conner
TYPISTS	Peggy Gaskin, Carol Weir

THE COBRA

By Jim Jackson

Rhodes became aware of a dull pain in the small of his back; he rolled trying to find a comfortable position. He had been so exhausted that he had been able to sleep for the first few hours, but now the concrete floor of the picnic shelter was too hard and his eight dollar sleeping bag too thin for any more than a few minutes in one position. He looked at the three other figures on the concrete around him. They were sleeping fitfully, often turning or groaning. Rhodes unzipped his sleeping bag and slipped out of it. Stepping carefully between the mummy-like forms, he made his way quietly over the rocky ground to a stone fireplace, lit a cigarette from the embers, and sat down on the back of the fireplace. The stones were still warm so that they were welcome against him. He gazed at the bright, cold stars and wondered how long it would be before the sun would rise over the room of mountains and fill the canyon with warmth and movement.

Rhodes watched the sleepers. Even in the darkness he knew who slept in each bag. Earl and Langhammer were the long worn bags on opposite ends of the shelter. Wertz was the shorter deluxe bag in the middle. He could see the black porcupine crew cut of Wertz's head resting on a folded sweatshirt. It was strange, he thought, how innocent and vulnerable people look when they sleep. Wertz didn't appear so odious, or even unbearable, and if any of the legion of those he must have alienated found him now, they would never be so callous as to take their revenge on this sleeping lamb.

Rhodes thought about the first time he saw Wertz. That was only ten days ago, but it seemed longer. Earl, Langhammer, and Wertz had driven down from Ohio and picked him up, and they had headed for West Texas for two weeks of reptile collecting. Although the other two were companions of former trips, Wertz was new. And Wertz was unusual. Seeing him the first time was a mild shock. He was wearing a paint-spattered T-shirt and bermuda shorts, which did nothing toward concealing his obscenely bowed legs. Although his shoulders were heavy and muscled, he slumped them forward so that when he walked, his appearance suggested something simian. His head, which was perhaps a little too large for his short stature, was decorated by an aggressively bristling crew cut, horn-rimmed glasses over furtive blue eyes, and a set of buck teeth projecting forward at an insolent angle. His given name was Jim, but Wertz was not one of those people you call by their given name.

They had not even reached the Mississippi state line before Wertz had felt that he knew Rhodes well enough to become insulting. It had been "y'alls" and "y'allziz burned any churches lately?", until a pattern was clearly established. Badgering Rhodes was to be Wertz's amusement; presumably, the others had been intimidated from Ohio south and were no longer interesting quarry. Rhodes had pretended to take Wertz's contentiousness good naturedly, but it had quickly begun grating upon his self-respect. Wertz was like a little sweatbee which sings around your ear but darts when you slap to leave you only a smarting ear, or like the mosquito at night which forsakes its tormenting you only long enough to give you real hope that it is gone and then returns with increased vigor and viciousness. If Rhodes had committed any slight error, Wertz had always been there to point it out. He had marred the whole trip for Rhodes, and Rhodes was not sorry that they would be starting back today.

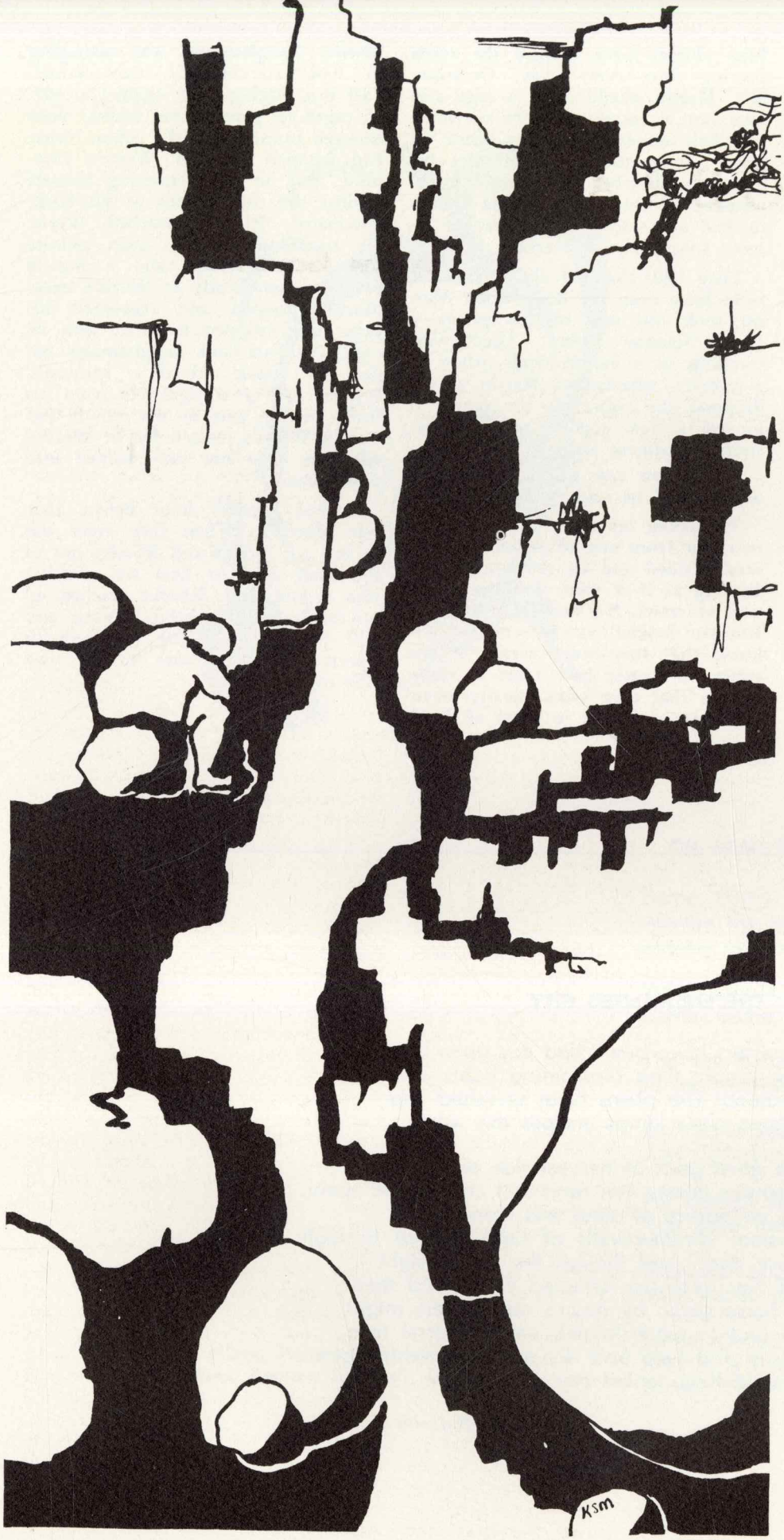
When the sky began to lighten, Rhodes revived the fire and started boiling coffee. Soon the others were roused by the wind-borne smell of frying bacon. During breakfast they discussed plans for the day.

"We could get in another morning's collecting here and still get to San Antonio early tonight," said Earl.

"Yeah, I hate to leave without even seeing a *pyromelena,* but if we get into San Antone too late, we'll miss seeing Martin's collection. And it's worth seeing," replied Langhammer.

"Suppose we collect here 'til eleven o'clock, and then we can still make San Antonio before nine tonight," said Earl.

After packing the car, they picked up their collecting sacks and snake sticks and walked out of the campground into the boulder strewn canyon. Soon they had separated, each picking his own way. Rhodes looked around to see where the others were; Earl was not in sight; Wertz was behind him and to the right; Langhammer was far to the left. Shortly, an inviting gulch came into his view on the right side of the canyon, and he headed toward it. He worked his way up the gulch, his eyes scrutinizing every foot of the ground and reaching as far into each crevice as light penetrated. He systematically turned the smaller rocks and the few rotting juniper logs. Several spiny lizards scurried in front of him, but he did not give them a thought since they had collected many on the first day here. He was almost at the head of the gulch when he flipped over a flat rock with his stick and stopped still as he saw the small tan, red, and black snake coiled where the rock had been—*Lampropeltis pyromelena.* By God, it was! He stared at the delicate-looking snake, not fully convinced that the rarity was real. Only when the snake began to play itself out of the coil and move like a living rope did Rhodes pick it up. He held it carefully, admiring it. It was a nearly perfect specimen with only a small scar on its neck. Rhodes felt like whooping, but he merely placed the snake in a sack and turned back to



the mouth of the gulch. He would take it from the sack nonchalantly when he showed it to the others. He continued up the canyon for a few minutes, but he was too excited to continue routine searching, and he reversed his direction.

Near the mouth of the gulch where he had caught the snake, Rhodes came upon Wertz sitting on a boulder. He was holding a small snake.

"Hey, Dad, how about this for a find," said Wertz. And he thrust before Rhodes a Lampropeltis *pyromelena.*

Rhodes examined the snake. It had a scar just where his did. He reached for the sack that hung limp from his belt. It was empty. Unbelieving, he ran his fingers inside the bottom of the sack, and his index finger poked out of a small hole in the seam.

"Wertz, that's my snake. I caught it right up that gulch," said Rhodes gesturing.

Wertz was putting the snake in one of his jars.

"It must have dropped out of my sack when I came by here going up the canyon."

"I know it did. I saw it fall out," said Wertz in his most supercilious tone.

"Then give it back to me."

"If I hadn't picked it up, it would have crawled off and been gone. I've got it and I'm keeping it."

Rhodes flushed with anger. For a moment he thought he was going to strike Wertz, but he did not. Wertz strode off in the direction of the campground, his shoulders slumped and his eyes searching the ground.

Rhodes leaned on his stick and surveyed the canyon. He had been in it eight days, but this was the first time that he had really looked at it. The walls were of immense blocks of red and brown stone, in some places so rectangular that they might have been carved by a superhuman stonecutter. Hidden in the gulches which serrated the straight line of the canyon walls, small gnarled junipers grew like old men bent from too many years of burden-bearing. A sparse but uniform growth of prickly pear and spiny ocotillo covered the flat gray floor of the canyon, which was dotted with boulders that would have been large anywhere else. As Rhodes inclined his eyes toward the infinite dome of turquoise sky over the canyon, a sensation of unreality swept him. He knew he was trivial.

They left the campground that morning for San Antonio. Rhodes

was silent, and the others, perhaps sensing the depth of his desperation, were unusually quiet. Outside of San Antonio the car began wobbling, and Earl pulled it off the road. A tire was flat, so Earl and Rhodes began to change it. Earl held the light while Rhodes tried to assemble the jack. He couldn't get the jack to operate and was still bumbling with it when Wertz stepped from the car and shouldered him out of the way. He watched Wertz change the tire, but he felt nothing, not even hatred.

In San Antonio, they stopped in front of a very average suburban home. At the door they were greeted by a huge tanned man sporting a blond mustache. This was J. M. Martin, owner of the finest private collection of reptiles in the country. There were aquaria full of turtles in the living room and cages of lizards in the kitchen, but Martin ushered them through these to his pride—a large bedroom converted into a serpentarium by tiers of cages from ceiling to floor and racks of cages in the middle of the room so that there was little space to walk between them. The cages held exotic snakes from all over the world. The four visitors went around the room peering into every cage. Occasionally, Martin would open a cage and take out an especially rare specimen for their admiration. They spent an hour among the cages; Rhodes became so absorbed in trying to remember all the names of the exotics he had never seen before that he almost forgot about Wertz.

They had circuited the room and were back near the door when Martin took out one of his prizes—a small Siamese Cobra. They were standing in a rough circle when to everyone's amazement Martin gently dropped the cobra to the floor. It moved a few inches and stopped, stretched almost straight.

"Now you can get a better idea of its size," he said.

The cobra lay there no more than two feet from any of them. Its head was inclined and its red tongue was flicking as if it were deciding which way to crawl. No one said anything. Rhodes looked at the others. He knew that they were afraid of the cobra no matter how tame it might be but that they were equally afraid of being squeamish in front of J. M. Martin. Langhammer was managing to look convincingly unconcerned. Earl was edging back against a rack of cages to gain a few inches more between himself and the cobra. Sweat had popped out on Wertz's forehead, and he was flattening himself against the closed door at his back. Fascinated, Rhodes watched Wertz. He could see Wertz's shirt pulsate with each heartbeat and a muscle twitch spasmodically in Wertz's neck. Martin stooped and recovered his prize and dropped it deftly into its cage. As Earl and Langhammer began to praise Martin's specimen, Rhodes took two cigarettes from his shirt, putting one in his mouth and one in Wertz's mouth. He lit Wertz's cigarette, then his, and walked into the kitchen.

It was another hour before they left Martin's. When they went out to the car, Wertz and Rhodes got in the back seat. As Earl was shifting into second gear, Rhodes reached up on the back ledge behind Wertz and slid the jar with the *Lampropeltis pyromelena* in it over to his own side of the car.

THE ENCHANTED CITY

The harvesters have bewitched our open land.
See how tonight their blossoming lights are curled
Horizon-round! The plains have vanished and
A throbbing city's lamps enclose the world.

Here the great gods of harvest ride alone
On monstrous beasts that rend and champ and spew,
Building no edifice of steel and stone,
But transient window-walls of light pierced through
The heavy dark. And though the magic sight
Fades at first dawn to flattened fields, and then
All the fierce gods, by noon's remorseless might,
Are changed to work-stained, weary mortal men,
When farm and field and sky are black with night,
They'll build their fabled city once again.

—Charles Malcolm Schofield

First Place, Poetry Competition,
Southern Literary Festival, 1966

OH BOD: FOR EDITH SITWELL

Dame, Dame,
Always the same,
Mentor of madness, out to maim,

Wrap your turban round your hair;
Dame, Dame, be debonair.

The raw-boned hand with which you write,
In gay facade, I treat as light,

But know you in another tone
And different form than light-raw-bone.

For though you turned them out to riot
You gave their ears a brand-new diet:

Elizabeth singing "whining light"
May startle many into sight.

Dame, Dame,
Mad as a flame,
Excuse these lines of gay acclaim.

—Greg Henry

ENCHANTED VALLEY

The narrow path wound away
To the soft quiet of the valley.
By the path stood azaleas,
Drooping their delicate heads
In the soft summer rain.

A scent, sweet and strong, rose
From the clear, white faces
Of the flowers. The sound of our feet
Hid in the dank, rich moss as
A mockingbird's note rose clear and cool.

The air, filled with azalea scent,
Mingled their sweet and heady essence
With the steady, insistent rain and
The liquid note of the mockingbird
Creating an enchanted valley.

—Margaret Sarah Hearn

A PEBBLE TILL "THE BETTERING OF THE TIME"

I tried to build a monument to you
And praise your beauty to the skies
But every stone I tried to lay on stone
Came tumbling down before my eyes.

So this is all I bring today, one pebble
From the fall.—It's all I have
To give that's left from all I tried to do.—
But Venus rose from one small wave.

—Thomas Hubert

TO TELL YOU YOU ARE LOVELY

To tell you you are lovely I have meant
To do but by your loveliness my tongue
Has been waylaid and killed of its intent,
And praises you have gendered go unsung.
To die within my throat has been their fate,
The womb and grave at once for laud of you,
And my slow heart comes to revive too late
The organ that would joyfully sound your due.
Forgive me if my tongue's stilled by your grace,
Forgive me if I let your music die,
But ships were never launched by the fairest face;
Men are so stunned their ships in harbor lie.
They cannot move till they avert their eyes,
Relieved by the dullness of the sunlit skies.

—Thomas Hubert

LOVE

I guess I loved her before I slept with her even before I met her back in November even before we was born sometime way back before He took it upon Hisself to make a order out of the disturbance I loved her because then some part of us come together and that part split up each taking a part of the other with it and all through that time it kept that part of the other with it until now them two parts come together again to stay together even after we are gone back because we never was here to begin with only them two parts and they will go on being here even when He turns everything back into disturbance again because Him and them two things is all there was to begin with and neither one of them can get rid of the other nor wants to

—Calvin Burton

TO . . .

How can I sing your praise with aged words
That stumble fat with time and fall to dust?
When you have beauty like a flight of birds,
How can I sing your praise with aged words?
When wise old men have failed with sage absurds,
And young hot lovers too with May's wild must,
How can I sing your praise with aged words
That stumble fat with time and fall to dust?

—Greg Henry

RAIN

Street-lamps shimmer on the parking-lot
As needles of wetness whip my shirt
and sting my face.
Half-naked trees lean greatly before the wind,
Throwing great chunks of wetness
at the silver brick street below.
A car passes on the highway, its wheels
Singing to the wind as best they can.
Cigarette-smoke pauses briefly,
Then speeds on its way.
The spark of my smoke spirals crazily away
And dies on the rippling asphalt.
I turn and go back to my book,
Back to security and Stravinsky
on the stereo.
Outside nature plays a gradual crescendo;
Trees voice rustling complaints to the wind
amid the sparkling silver rain.

—Charles L. Culp

THE BIRTH-DEATH RELATIONSHIP IN T. S. ELIOT'S "JOURNEY OF THE MAGI"

By Betty Whatley

Second Place, Formal Essay Competition, Southern Literary Festival, 1966

T. S. Eliot's "Journey of the Magi" is one of the most successful and moving presentations of the birth-death relationship which he regarded as practically the key to existence. He believed that if one could understand the intricate workings of the relationship and could experience the necessary death and rebirth, perhaps he would be saved from the world's depravity and insensitivity. This salvation is precisely what the Magi in his poem sought. However, what they found was much more complex. The birth and death combination proved to be nonrevolutionary in so far as it did not change the callous attitude of the world. Instead, it actually alienated the Magi from their own people who did not have the "new life." Nor did the journey provide the wise men with any astonishing revelation—it was merely satisfactory.

Nevertheless, the magus relating the journey would go again to Bethlehem, even at the expense of being "no longer at ease here, . . . with an alien people. Indeed, he would "be glad of another death," even one begot by "hard and bitter agony." This seeming contradiction to the Magus' original attitude rapidly gains momentum in the poem and actually becomes the essence of "The Journey of the Magi."

The disparity between what the Magi sought and what they found not only goes to make the poem an entity: It also accounts for the very style Eliot used.

The narrating Magus is astonished and perplexed by the fact that what he found was not a simple promise of rebirth, but rather, the confusing possibility of a rebirth by "hard and bitter agony . . . like death." For this reason, he does not know exactly how to describe his journey. At first, he relates it in unemotional, precise, and factual terms and even designates the ultimate experience in Bethlehem as "satisfactory."

This almost-travelogue style and the virtual absence of emotion strikingly accentuate the irony that the promise of Bethlehem was not at all glorious as the Magus had expected, but instead, terribly bitter and soul-shaking. Indeed, the impact of the Birth was so great on the Magus that he could only tell it objectively, and "satisfactory" was the only word that he could use. However, the irony of his whole description, and particularly his use of "satisfactory" to describe the so-desperately-sought experience, not only effectively impresses one with the tremendous disparity between the Magus' expectation and the reality of the Birth, but also serves as a sort of dramatic device to stop the Magus' seemingly mechanical narration.

The impact of the irony of his own description of the journey and, finally, of the Birth overcomes the wise man, and his narration deviates from fact into his own mind, wherein the true and full significance of the tumultuous events is awakened. The stirring of latent, painful emotions comes in a rush:

> All this was a long time
> ago, I remember,
> And I would do it again,
> but set down
> This set down . . .

For a moment the old man's thoughts almost chaotically tumble out. The effect is magnificent: The reader's reaction to the emptiness of the Birth and the Magus' reaction to the inadequacy of his tale become almost one. Thus, the reader is transported practically into the poem to confront directly the problem, the "hard and bitter" agony of birth by death. Related in the calm, yet emotion-taut, words of the wise old man, the revelation leaves no doubt that this is the full truth of Bethlehem.

Yet, the experience in the Holy Land is significant only in its relation to the rest of mankind and to the immediate present. As soon as the Magi discovered the relationship between birth and death and particularly in the paradoxically bitter blessing, they, very significantly, returned to their native land to face the greatest irony of all—the irony that the hard-won victory through death brought them only alienation from their own people who still clung to their old gods.

The inevitable isolation of those who have come to a knowledge of the Birth in Death, is foreshadowed from the very beginning of the poem. The first stanza vividly portrays the world in a total winter, not only of weather, but also of human morality and charity:

> A cold coming we had of it, . . .
> the camel men cursing and
> grumbling
> And running away, and wanting
> their
> liquor and women, . . .
> And the cities hostile and the towns
> unfriendly
> And the villages dirty and charging
> high prices . . .

Even after their arrival in the "temperate valley" — the ultimate symbol of rebirth with its vegetation, plentiful water, and galloping white horse—there are signs of man's depravity and portents of the traumatic and paradoxical nature of the event to come. First, the Magi see the "three trees on the low sky," symbolizing not the simple, glorious birth they had sought, but rather, the fierce agony of the Death that must come to carry out the promise of the Birth and which they themselves must experience to reach their goal of regeneration.

This immutable unity of regeneration and destruction is definitely established and subtly enlarged by the image of the old white horse. Eliot had probably read both G. K. Chesterton's "Ballad of the White Horse" in which the white horse symbolized the destruction of paganism by Christianity,[1] and Rilke's "Sonnete on Orpheus" in which the horse, like Orpheus, became a "transformer, one who can transcend time and unity, past and present, and the

(Continued on Page 20)

I TRIED TO THINK ABOUT US

I lay down upon the rocks and saw above the shore
A mast-head swaying faintly and a grass-blade swaying more.

And which was more substantial and which was more like me—
A mast-head, or a grass-blade, the smooth rock or the sea?

I tried to think about us, and why we all were made,
The ocean and the sailor and the swaying grass-blade.

But I never thought a thing, except—what motion is as calm
As the shadow of the motion of a grass-blade in my palm.

—Charles Malcolm Schofield

HOW MUCH OF BEAUTY

How much of beauty can the heart endure?
How many scenes of yellowed aspen trees
Flung like melody upon the mountain's face
Can move the being beyond need for more?
How long can one see what the anointed sees
Of sunlight, gold on gold in endless grace,
Rising like torches into cobalt space?
How many seasons of such ecstasies
And wonder can the aching mind remember
And hoard within its store of memories
As one stands awed upon the silent shore
While all his eager pounding heartbeats trace
A majesty distilled, uplighting, pure?
How much of beauty can the heart endure?

—Charles Malcolm Schofield

FOR JUDITH

Whenever this static and steel world
Attempts to push you into one of its
Standard and narrow molds,
Remember the god within yourself
And forever struggle to obtain
The blessing of your own mind.

—Daniel Gray

DYING IS JUST LIKE GOING TO SLEEP

By Jim Jackson

They walked mechanically through the wrecked woods. Almost every tree had been broken or split by the artillery barrage several days before. Although they picked up their feet with the carelessness born of fatigue, they set them down precisely where the man before had added his share to the communal footprint. At the head of the line the lieutenant consulted a map every few steps.

Clifford Layman was third behind the lieutenant. As he walked, he held his head erect and studied the dirty neck of the man in front of him, for he knew if he relaxed at all he would fall asleep. It had always struck him as strange the way the birds would sing in woods wrecked by shelling like these. Back home along Shoal Creek if you just fired a shotgun at a squirrel, all the birds would get quiet like mourners in a funeral parlor. But the birds here must have gotten used to all the noise and death; they had had four years to do it in.

His foggy thoughts were interrupted by the lieutenant's voice. "We're out'a the mine field now. Spread out, about twenty feet between ya. There are probably Huns in the other end of the woods."

They advanced quietly over fallen limbs clothed in dying leaves. They had not gone far when the man to the left of Layman whispered to him, "Ease the others on yore right over this deerection. They've spotted some Huns on the center."

Layman passed the word and with the five men to his right swung around at an angle to the previous line of advance. They soon heard German voices. Layman could just make out several grey-clad figures around a machine gun when the man to his left whispered again.

"Lieutenant says to rush 'em with our pigstickers when we get closer. He don't want no firin' if we kin hep it."

Layman passed the word; then he took his bayonet from its sheath and fitted it to the barrel of his rifle. The wicked look of the long blade never failed to give him a shudder because he disliked knives since the Saturday in Springville when he saw one of the Eldridge boys cut the sheriff. After a moment they started forward again. They were creeping along being careful to keep behind tree trunks as much as they could when they heard the lieutenant's whistle blow. Layman was not expecting it yet and he was unready. Glancing at the others, he saw that they were also. But Warren next to him jumped erect and shouted, "Let's go. If they start with that gun, we're dead."

Layman forced his exhausted legs to run by thinking about every step. A few strides gave him a clear view of the Germans. They were eating. But a wave of heat passed through him when he realized that they could get the machine gun firing before the nearest American got close enough to use his bayonet. As he ran, it occurred to him that the lieutenant must have thought the right flank was nearer the Huns than it was. Now since the right was closest to them, the Huns would hit it with the machine gun. He saw the Germans drop their mess kits and expected them to grab the gun and turn it toward him. When instead they shot their hands into the air, he was stunned. For once, he really knew that he would be torn by the hot bullets. For once, he had been ready to get it all over with. He was disappointed because he did not expect to be so well prepared again. When it came next time, he would not be ready and it would come and take him like a hawk on a sparrow, with no warning.

Warren reached the Germans first. Jabbing at them with his bayonet, he herded them out of the pit. Layman stood by panting. He looked into their stupid, open faces and wondered if they knew they could have cut him and the others down. They looked so fresh and young that he decided they must be newly conscripted replacements. The lieutenant ran up and began trying to interrogate the Germans, but when he asked if they spoke English they looked at him blankly. He took their papers from them and studied them carefully.

Most of the Americans had sat down on the ground and were smoking cigarettes. They were all haggard; they either stared straight ahead with unseeing eyes or watched the five Germans.

"God," said the man next to Layman, "we can't keep on like this. Why don't they send up some of them damn Frenchmen we passed yesterday to give us some rest."

"I wish the Huns would stop runnin'. If they'd turn and fight, we'd have to wait for hep before we could attact. Then at least we'd git some rest," Layman replied. The man continued to talk but his voice was small as if it were across a field. Layman's head nodded; all he could think of was sleep.

"Layman, goddamn you, get up," shouted the lieutenant. "We're moving out and since you're worse off than anybody else, I'm letting you be the one to stay here and guard these damn Huns."

"Yes suh, lieutenant," stammered Layman, coming out of his doze suddenly and jumping to his feet. Then as the lieutenant turned away he asked, "Suh, could I taket he Huns back to the battalion headquarters? It'd be a whole lot easier to stay awake if I was walkin'."

"How in the hell are you going to get through that mine field? You just do what I say and watch those Huns."

Layman looked at the lieutenant's red, watery eyes and said, "Yes suh." He watched the twenty Americans pick up their rifles and rise from the ground. They spread out and resumed their advance through the woods. As they were disappearing between the trees, he motioned the Germans back into the pit and against the far wall. Moving his rifle up and down, he ordered them to sit down. Then he squatted against the other side of the pit and laid his rifle across his legs, but still pointing it at them.

He thought about home to help

him stay awake. He remembered that last year this time he had plowed a new patch of corn down near the spring branch. It had been a small jungle of blackberries before he cleared it, but it had produced the finest corn the farm had ever seen. He could feel himself being jolted along behind the mule, and he recalled how he would occasionally scoop up a handful of the black earth and deeply inhale its scent. It was the sweetest smelling dirt anywhere. He could almost smell it now and hear the liquid phrases of the mockingbird that was sitting in the pecan tree by the branch and the chatter of his little sisters who were playing up near the house.

But what was that whispering? He could not make it out; it sounded unfamiliar, like some foreign tongue. There are no foreigners around here, he thought. Then he jerked awake. Two of the Germans, tense for silent steps, were half way to him.

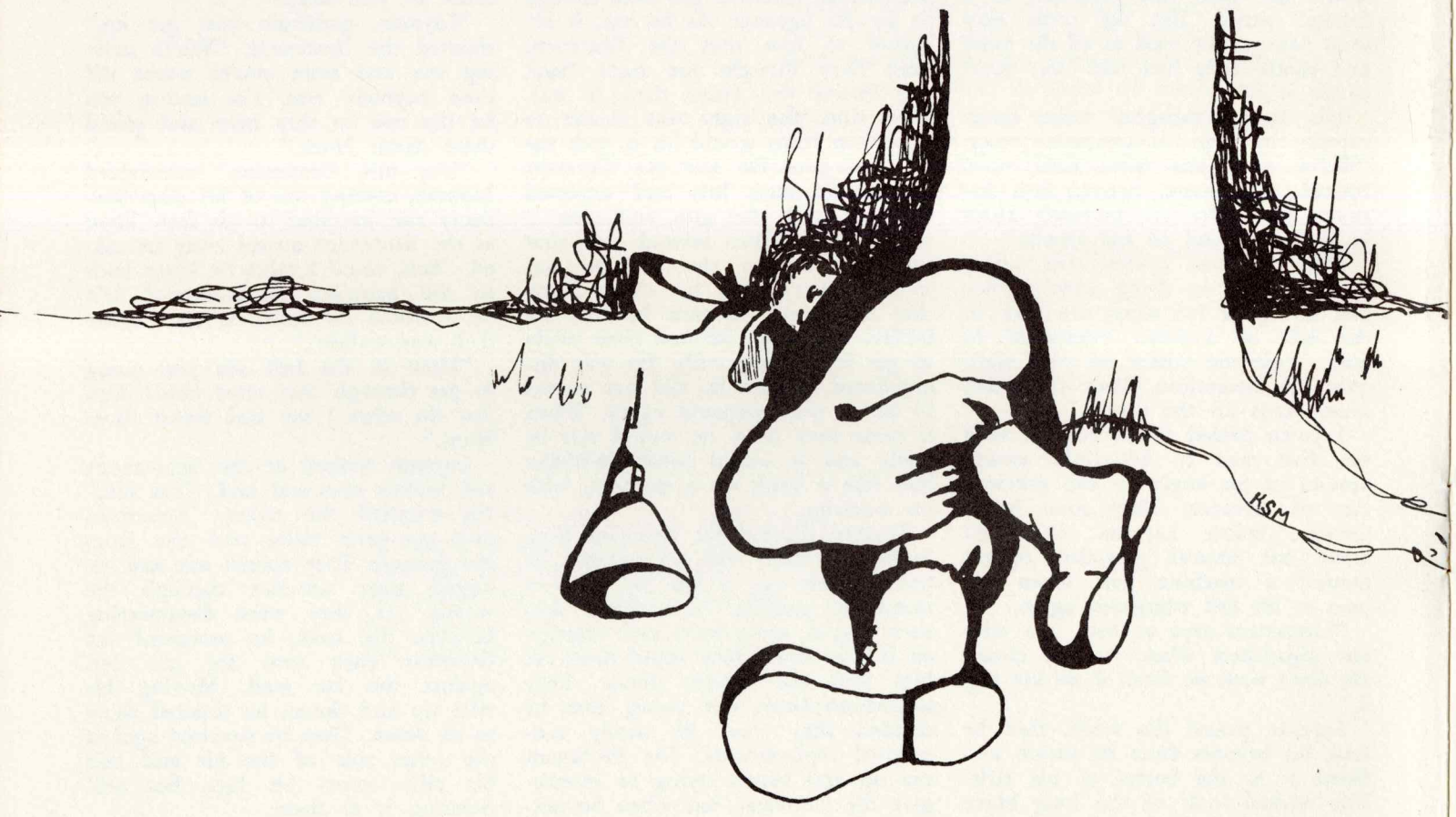
"Damn you Huns," he screamed, "git back over there!" He stood up and leaned against the wall of the pit. The Germans looked apprehensive now. One of them, a blond boy who could not have been more than sixteen, was shaking. Layman fixed his gaze upon the boy and thought that he looked too innocent to be out here. He wondered if he himself had looked that way when he first came to the war.

For no reason that he could see, Inez came to his mind. She was his sister who had died when he was ten. She had had blond hair too. He remembered the way she had looked when she was dressed up and went off to the singings in a buggy with her friends. She had been the oldest and was almost a mother to the rest of the children. When she died, his father had told them that she had gone to sleep forever, that dying was just like going to sleep. As he grew up, he had decided this was not true, but since he had been in France he thought about it regularly. When he saw corpses, he was often surprised at how much they resembled sleepers. Maybe there was some truth in the idea.

Layman woke up again just as the biggest German was reaching for his rifle. He lunged with the weapon and slashed the side of the German's face with the bayonet tip. The man fell backward and put a handkerchief over the wound, but none of his companions would help him; they just watched Layman.

"Damn you," yelled Layman. "Y'all won't say nothin'. Why don't y'all say something, even in Hun. Why do y'all keep watching me like that, like damn buzzards?"

Layman rubbed his bony face roughly. He tried to think about the word "awake" but it always became "sleep" in his mind. Even when he fully concentrated now, his head nodded like a broken seed top of Johnson grass in the wind. The Germans watched him silently. Layman rubbed his face again and then stepped out of the pit. He walked around to the front of it and stared down on the Germans. Slowly, he reached inside his coat and brought out a .45 caliber automatic pistol. The Germans still didn't move or speak. He did not think of anything as he shot four of them quickly. The fifth scrambled out of the pit and began to run. Layman felt his rifle raised as if the wind had done it and heard the report just before the German crumpled with a hole in his neck. He did not even check the four in the pit to make sure that they were dead before he lay down beneath a large tree.



CONTEMPLATION

I walk along the littered shore
Where waves have tossed and mixed debris,
Where heaps of husks and shells . . . a store
Of ocean's dead . . . wash endlessly.
They mingle with the kelp and weeds,
Remaining as the tide recedes.

I pick a cowrie from the mound
Piled up against the weathered pier.
A mottled nacre I have found
Among the mollusks lying there
Reminds me one can leave behind
A beauty those who seek may find.

—Charles Malcolm Schofield

THE FIRST KISS

The first kiss is a lipping kiss,
The sweetest one of all.
Who probes the flower too deep too soon
Will find its nectar stale.

For love at the lips grows from the heart
And not from lips to heart.
And he who loves before he loves
Ends love before its start.

—Thomas Hubert

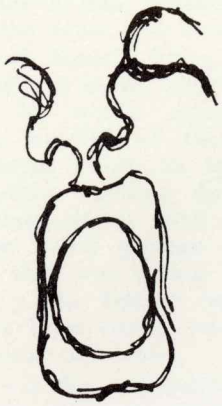
LOVE AND POETRY

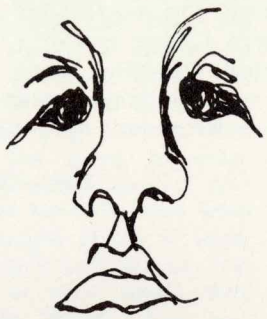
This is all I bring today,
This and my heart beside.
It's all I have to five away
That given will abide.

Just love in the open hand I bring
And something more or less,
Love clear as eye-blue skies in spring—
Substantial nothingness.

A gift for gods—which gods gave me—
I offer to your heart.
Imprisoned there it will be free
It's all I have to give away

—Thomas Hubert

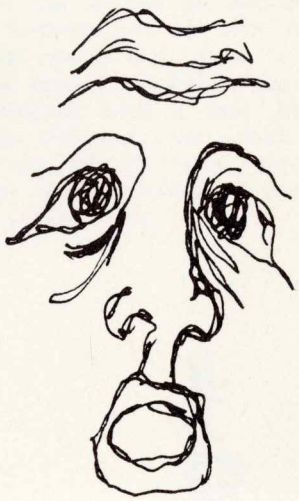




NIGHTMARE

Softly creeps the embracing sleep
Into the empty corridors of droopy minds.
Lashes lengthen and silently keep
Vigil over the innocent and knowing.
Bodies soft and pliant lie naive and safe.
The creature bestirs his vengeful shadow.
Faint and pulsating is blood under silk skin.
Deepening night shatters the tinkling window
And like a demon destroys tranquil sleep.
Fear is a bloody scream blundering in my throat
And staggering forth to bellow a curse upon the night.

—Margaret Sarah Hearn



ESCAPE

Brachen lay a tuft of hair on the quarry.
Paper-leafed willows whispered,
Showing their silver bellies.
Blackness melted around a man
As his image was smothered by the trees.

A bar of light on the horizon
Crossed again and again by willows,
Like a wrathe warlock's wands.
A hawk, a sudden crash of sound,
Rose, merged, and faded into silence.

The glimmer of dead light, a dark man,
Living in the darkness of the gallows,
Crushed brachen under frightened feet.
Pulse danced with delight at the game
Of hide and seek with hell for home.

—Margaret Sarah Hearn

CRYSTAL

Emotion crystallized with words—
Molded by thought
Carefully breathed as the artist
Breathes the warm shape
Exquisitely etched by punctuation.
Held up for inspection
Suspended—
Reflecting bright prisms of response.
A fragile creation of the mind
Shattered
By the vibration of its own sound:
A jagged tinkle of crystal fragments.
One learns
Cherished crystal must be protected
In velvet silence.

—Sharon Henderson

DECEMBER RITUAL

Your winter mind is not for the receiving
Of laughing boys with April in their eyes;
And dancing girls with scandal in their breathing
Are unfit company for heart's demise.
Fine russet lads would tremble at the greeting
You long to give them from your creaking chair;
And tender maids would choose another meeting
If they but knew your secret grumbling prayer.
How many Mays is it, can you remember,
Since you danced round another antique chair
And laughed a different thought in a December
That mocked another by your flashing hair?
You half recall it, and in your silence sing
A winter melody, in praise of Spring.

—Greg Henry

THE SATIN ESCAPE

By Nell Batton

"I'm afraid that there's nothing else we can do for her," the doctor is saying as he pulls the cool white sheet over my face. I say that the sheet is cool but I only assume this fact, because you see I am dead. Oh, don't feel sorry for me, I would hate that, even worse than the life that I shared with my elder sister Etta Jane. In fact I think that this is the only thing that I have ever done without her, dying. Oh, but she's close by I am sure. She wouldn't want to miss the slightest chance at stealing the scene.

Etta Jane has always been a little bit on the dramatic side, you know the kind. No matter what the situation, she has to be the center of attraction. Why I remember the time when Papa's third cousin died and Etta Jane insisted that we go to the funeral. She carried on so at the funeral that the director of the funeral gave her the smelling salts instead of giving it to the widow. There was quite a scandal as I remember. None of the immediate family knew who she was and they reasoned that she must have been the secret mistress of that poor soul coming out into the open to bemoan his death.

Now that Etta Jane has a good reason to whine and carry on, I am sure that she will take full advantage of it. I'm afraid that the world is about to see one of her most glorified performances.

"Oh, God, no, Lottie Mae, Lottie Mae don't do this to me, don't leave me in this cruel world all alone with no Mama and no Papa and nobody to turn to."

See, what did I tell you? Now isn't that just like her? I'm sure that this is only the prelude, and that the performances will improve according to the size of the audience. You must realize that she has only the doctor to sympathize with her at the moment. If only he would leave maybe she would quit slobbering all over me.

Well, the doctor has gone now and Etta Jane has turned herself off. I've seen her do it a thousand times. She can turn it on and off like hot and cold running. Now who is that coming in the door? It's two men with a stretcher. They must be from the funeral home. Oh, to get away from Etta Jane if only for a few hours. Now they are putting me in a big gray hearse. Now if this isn't something. I've never ridden in a rolling bedroom before. There's even curtains on the windows.

* * *

Well, here I lay all decked out in a very nice casket if I do say so myself. Naturally Etta Jane will want everyone to think that she provided me with a nicer than average funeral, but I have the satisfaction of knowing that it was me that kept my burial policy paid up every month. As best I can tell I have on a lovely yellow shroud. Yellow? Well, if that isn't just like Etta Jane! She knows that yellow is my worst color! But of course she couldn't stand the thought of me looking better than her, even as a corpse.

I knew that this peace and quiet couldn't last long. Here comes Etta Jane and most of our distant kin. Naturally she will insist on sitting up with me tonight. "It's the least that I can do," she will say. I can just hear her now. Not only will she be able to build up a little sympathy in preparation for the funeral but she will have the chance to get at my birthstone ring. Ever since Mama died and gave me her birthstone ring with six real rubies and two diamonds Etta Jane has tried to figure out a way to have it for her own. She used to tell everybody that it wasn't her fault that she hadn't been born in the same month as Mama so that she could get the ring.

"Don't she look good," says Etta Jane, "considering what all she's been through, dying and all." One of our neighbors is standing with Etta Jane and looking down at me and consoling the sobbing Etta Jane at the same time. "She always told me to be sure that she was buried in yellow if she went before me." And with this Etta Jane bursts forth with a new stream of tears. "Now, now, dear," says the neighbor, "this is just too much for you, you poor dear." With this our consoling neighbor leads Etta Jane away from the casket.

"I just can't leave her alone here tonight." By this time a pretty large crowd has gathered, around who? You guessed it—Etta Jane. "I just can't be alone myself tonight with nobody to turn to," she wails on.

Well, as it turns out, Etta Jane is going to spend the night with the neighbor, thank God. But never fear she'll get that birthstone ring one way or the other.

* * *

Well, the place is full and it looks like I'm going to have quite a nice crowd for the funeral. But of course Etta Jane made sure that she will have a sizeable audience for her star performance. I still haven't figured out how she is going to get that ring. Knowing her, she will dig me up if she has to. I used to tell her that she would get that ring over my dead body—I never dreamed that

this would be true.

Well, I have always heard that funerals are for the benefit of the living and now I know that this is true. Ever since the service began the preacher has talked about nothing but how they (meaning mostly Etta Jane) should have the strength to carry on even though their loved one has departed. For all the attention that Etta Jane is getting with her hysterical moaning, I may as well not even be here. She wouldn't even let a dog have its day!!

Oh, no, I knew that the time would come eventually. The family is going to come up to see me for the last time before they close the casket. Etta Jane is going to have to make her move if she intends to get that ring. One of the neighbors is half carrying her up here to the casket.

"Let me go by myself, I want to kiss her goodbye for the very last time in my whole life," wails Etta Jane. With this she lunges at me, almost knocking the casket off the stand. For a moment I thought she was going to crawl in with me. She'll do anything for attention. While she is leaning over me where no one can see she is slipping my birthstone ring off my finger. Well, thank goodness for that. I just knew that she was going to have to wait until I was buried six feet under. Now that the funeral is over and she's got the ring I can rest easy that she won't ever bother me again. For the first time in my life (and death) I am at ease. The pallbearers are closing the satin lined top of the casket and all is quiet now. At last I have found my escape.

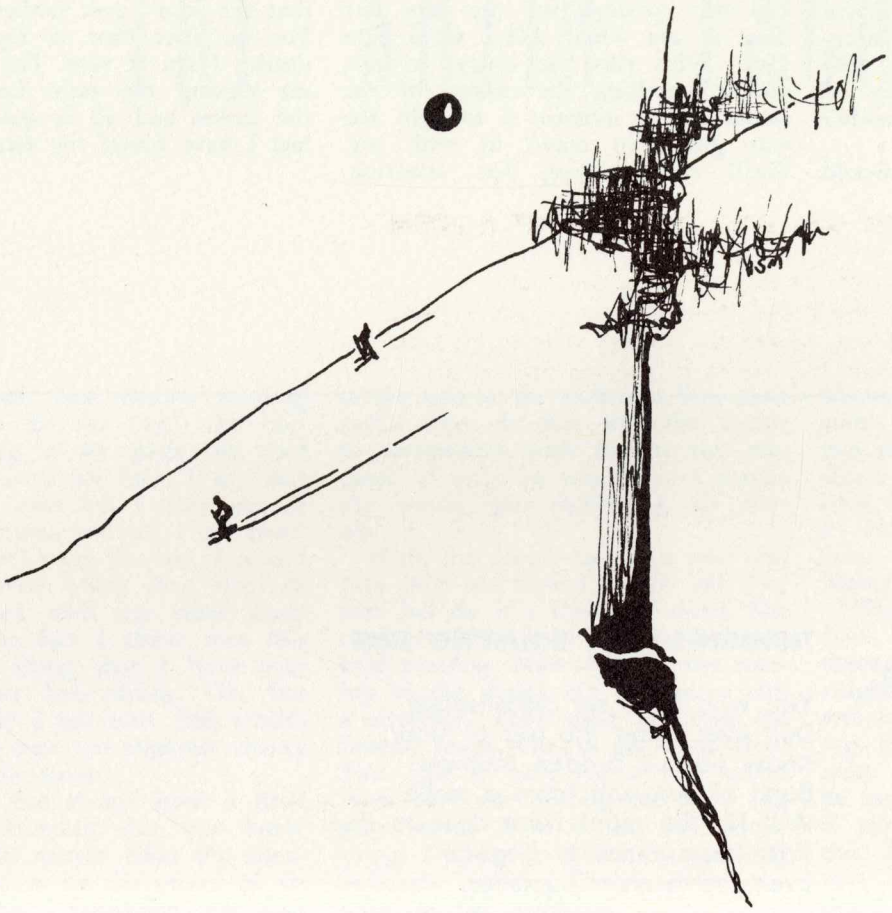
THOUGHTS IN A DOUBTING TIME

You who have sat disconsolate,
Dull eyes upon the rug or floor,
Know how a sudden intimate
Burst of sun will force a smile,
Will fill the room from door to door
With reassurance to beguile
Even the heart's inquisitor.

Once I remember looking West
Into the sad, soft evening sky.
An ill-shaped cloud disturbed my quest
Of beauty; like a thing of woe
It gathered speed and hurried by,
Then paused to shed a dazzling glow
Of crimson glory. Who am I,

And who are we to question when
A city's episode of day,
Reaching for its meridian,
Gathers an early madrigal,
A wood-note, luminous and gay,
From one small sparrow's vocal scrawl?
Ah, who am I to say?

—Charles Malcolm Schofield



SONG OF THE SKIS

Skis, sing softly down this hill.
Glide and croon on the sleepy snow of dawn
While the moon is a shadow deep and still
In a sky where dreams have gone.
Speed and hum
In the quickened silver dust.
Through the chrysolite of day
Track away 'til the moon is a crust
Gnawed by shadows, and the wind
Is a gay moth caught and pinned,
Softly sing and softly come
Down the last slow-sighing way.

—Charles Malcolm Schofield

TO THE GIRL WHO DIDN'T WANT A POEM

No garish beauty of a golden sun
Could merit half the praise of yellow hair,
Nor lilacs where the lilting windsongs run
One half the praise of tresses on the air.

Green girls with summer praises in their shining,
Who know the sun will hold them fresh today,
Care not that autumn winds may catch them dying
Or that young hearts they caught may fly away.

And you the greenest of the golden girls,
Who locked in loops of yellow hair my heart,
What could you care for songs to praise your curls,
That green and gold have lauded with their art?

No one could care, til time has dulled your worth
And set your golden hair in the green earth.

—Greg Henry

POEM

A silver swan sits
Softly upon muddy water, crying
Pearl tears of quiet love.

—Margaret Sarah Hearn

THE BIRTH-DEATH RELATIONSHIP

(Continued from Page 9)

physical and the spiritual."[2] This background, together with the traditional mythology surrounding the white horse and the fact that Eliot particularly notes that the horse was old, makes the animal not only the harbinger of a newly-born world but also points to the transcendent nature of the Christian experience and to the reality of both the spiritual and physical. Thus, the image symbolizes both "birth-in-death" and "life-in-death," since the horse is "old" and the possibility of a new life is uncertain[3] in this physical world where "feet kick empty wine skins" and men "toss dice for pieces of silver" even in the presence of the "three trees on the low sky."

Man's depravity even within the fertile valley and the Death's presence even at the time of the Birth bring again fierce irony and the bewildering paradox of regeneration through destruction, but by this time, in the light of the rest of the poem, it becomes profoundly emphatic. Christ was born to die, to destroy the old order and to bring in the new order. To gain the new life, both He and the old life would have to die.

Just as this physical death of Christ is Christianity's symbol of regeneration, in "Journey of the Magi," it becomes Eliot's symbol of an inner, individual birth and death rather than a transformation of society as a whole. In other words, to find a new life in this senseless and meaningless world, one must do as the Magus did and destroy the old order of the world within one's self, so experiencing the "hard and bitter agony" of his own death in order to gain rebirth. But, the Magus discovers that even as with Christ himself, the conquest of self provides no ultimate answer. The world continues as it was before. It merely separates and alienates those who dare to be different, who dare give the supreme sacrifice of self for a new birth. Indeed, it will perhaps welcome and even demand their deaths as the Jewish crowd demanded Christ's crucifixion. Even more appalling are those people like the soldiers who were not even alive enough to realize that they were in the immediate presence of the most significant of all births and deaths:

> . . . [at the] tavern . . . there
> was no information.

These men merely cast lots for His robes and perceived nothing.

In such a world, it is little wonder that the Ancient Magus "should be glad of another death," a death which perhaps would somehow bring a new birth that would be above the spiritually dead world. But, even in another death, there is not much hope of a complete escape. Even Christ, after his resurrection, is confronted with a return to the world of uncaring men. The mere, though tumultuous, "satisfaction" of the first promise for rebirth foreshadows the same for any second rebirth. Indeed, the hope of escape by death to a new, more perfect system seems dim.

In truth, Eliot can find little Christian hope in the Birth. However, in it, in the hope it symbolizes—the hope that death will bring rebirth—Eliot finds the thin thread, not of faith or even hope, but of possibility that there may at least be rejuvenation with which to escape partially "death-in-life." This thread which Eliot manages to grasp and to cling to provides escape from the complete death of the spirit which is characteristic of the world of Prufrock and the "Hollow Men." The same thin thread allows him to enter the world where there is the possibility of "dying into life" and where it does thunder in the possibility of rain.

Thus, "Journey of the Magi" describes in the uncertain destination of the Magi Eliot's own tentative conclusion to his journey in search of a meaningful life. His search, carried on in spite of "winter" and "voices singing in his ears, saying/That this was all folly," led not to an ultimate triumph, but to a small hope, the same kind of hope nurtured by the ancient Magus, that perhaps there shall be some escape from the vacant, senseless void which seems to enclose all.

FOOTNOTES

1. Robert Kaplan and Richard Wall, "Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi,'" *The Explicator,* XIX (November, 1960), 8.
2. Margaret Church, "Eliot's 'Journey of the Magi,'" *The Explicator,* XVIII (June, 1960), 55.
3. *Ibid.*